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Penn newspaper: CIA stalling on documents

By Jan Schaffer
Inquirer Staff Writer

The Daily Pennsylvanian, the student newspaper at the University of Pennsylvania, yesterday filed suit accusing the CIA of deliberately stalling on the newspaper's request for information.

The suit says that, under the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the newspaper in September 1977 asked for access to all documents pertaining to the relationships between the CIA and members of the university community.

However, in May 1979, the CIA supplied only a portion of the documents and has failed to respond to the newspaper's appeal for almost a year, according to the suit filed in U.S. District Court.

"This is an inordinately long period of time," said Jack Levine, the newspaper's attorney. The FOIA requires a government agency to respond within 10 days to an initial request and 20 days to an appeal.

The suit contends that the agency is deliberately stalling while it tries to secure passage of new legislation

that would exempt it from the FOIA requirements.

Among the items that the newspaper asserts were withheld are documents pertaining to Project MK-ULTRA, a CIA project conducted from 1953 to 1964 that included research on drugs, behavior modification and mind-altering techniques. In 1977, along with 80 other universities and companies, the university was informed that some of the research for the project was conducted at Penn.

The paper asked for information of activities in the university community by the CIA, FBI or foreign intelligence agents monitoring foreign student dissidents.

It also sought disclosure of documents pertaining to CHAOS and RESISTANCE, CIA projects that involved surveillance of American dissenters on college campuses during the Vietnam War.

In addition, the paper asked for documents pertaining to organizations that served as "fronts" for the CIA to fund information-gathering or research by people in the university community.